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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000901

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY
NSC FOR MILLARD

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: SA DAS CAMP MEETS KING, POLITICAL PARTIES:
EACH SIDE DUG IN, MUTUALLY MISTRUSTFUL

Classified By: CDA JANET BOGUE. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a May 5 meeting with Nepal,s King Gyanendra and a May 6 meeting with representatives of the main political parties, SA DAS Camp found both sides deeply distrustful of the other and adamant that they would not budge from their positions. (Both meetings took place before the resignation of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa on May 8.) The King insisted he did not want absolute power; he said he was committed to holding elections and wanted constitutional monarchy to succeed. If the political parties could not come up with a consensus program and candidate to head a new government, he &could not wait forever8 and would proceed with an appointed government to plan elections. The parties believe the King cannot be trusted, is seeking absolute power and is merely maneuvering to split the parties. The only unity evident in Kathmandu comes from the international community. It was clear from DAS Camp,s meetings with diplomats and major donors, including the Indians, on the margins of the Nepal Development Forum, that the international community is pressing both the King and the parties to compromise for the sake of restoring democratic processes and presenting a united front against the Maoists. End Summary.

MEETING WITH KING GYANENDRA

2. (C) On May 5, SA DAS Donald Camp, accompanied by the Charge d,Affaires, called on Nepal,s King Gyanendra. (As usual, Gyanendra had no aides present for the meeting.) After thanking the United States for its support in Nepal,s struggle against Maoist insurgents, the King turned to the issue of the day: the political impasse in Kathmandu. King Gyanendra said he had made a commitment to the people of Nepal to hold elections in this Nepali year (meaning by spring 2005). The people, the King said, wanted peace, stability, transparency, development and democracy that &reaches the lowest of the low.8 The King said that he did not expect the parties to deliver all that; what he wanted from them was a government that could create &a conducive environment8 for elections. It was up to the parties, he said, to choose who should lead that government. He argued that the party leaders had been unable to overcome their self-interest and old antagonisms to rally around a single candidate, nor had they presented him with a joint program. If they did not, he concluded, he would prepare elections with an appointed government. The King reiterated frequently that he did not seek absolute power but to preserve the constitution. As proof, he said, he had not censored or shut newspapers when they criticized him, although the law allowed it. &Where else,8 he said,8 has a head of state been belittled in the press like this, and I have done nothing.8

3. (C) DAS Camp said it was not for outsiders to resolve Nepal,s political crisis. However, U.S. support for Nepal was threatened because democracy was at risk, and human rights abuses committed by government security forces damaged Nepal's image abroad. As Commander in Chief, the King could play an effective role in reducing those violations. The King also had the &hard but necessary8 task of carrying through a political process with the party leaders that would succeed in the restoration of a democratic government. DAS Camp asked if there were any effort to hold local elections) as a show of good faith) in places where the security situation would permit, including the Kathmandu Valley.

4. (C) King Gyanendra replied that there had been no suggestion of local elections. His own vision was to have the parties form a &multi-sectoral8 (Note: the King avoided saying &multi-party.8 End note) government that would give way to a technocratic, caretaker government a few months before elections, on the Bangladesh model. DAS Camp noted that elections were the ultimate answer to the impasse, while acknowledging that the security situation made elections problematic. The King repeated forcefully that he had made a

commitment to elections and would go forward, with or without the parties.

DINNER WITH PARTY REPRESENTATIVES

15. (C) On May 6, DAS Camp met representatives of the major parties at a dinner hosted by the DCM. Those present included CPN-UML leader Madhav Nepal, RPP leader Pashupati Rana, Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, and Nepali Congress representatives Ram Sharan Mahat and Ram Chandra Poudel. The party leaders were as adamant as the King: there could be no progress until the King met their demands, met with them together, and accepted the government of their choosing. While party leaders differed along predictable lines about the best scenario for restoring a democratic process, they were remarkably unified in their distrust of the King. Madhav Nepal said simply &He cannot be trusted. He wants total power.8 The King,s meetings with individual party representatives were seen most darkly as efforts to divide and conquer the political parties, and most charitably as an effort to appear to the public that he was trying to resolve the current stalemate. Two lawyers, the head of the Nepal Bar Association and a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and drafter of Nepal's Constitution, raised the usual questions about the constitutional basis of the King's actions in dissolving one government and appointing two others.

16. (C) The senior Nepali Congress (NC) representatives, Mahat and Poudel, both claimed that the King's call for a consensus candidate for Prime Minister was a "game" that he is playing with the parties to avoid having to take a more direct path back to democratic government, such as reinstating the last Parliament. The two NC leaders made two different and somewhat incompatible arguments in separate conversations. One argument favored by Mahat was that the King had no justification for demanding that the protesting parties reach a consensus on a prime minister because political parties, by their very nature, are bound to disagree. Alternatively, they argued that the King should have no say in the choice of a prime minister because this was the prerogative of the parties as representative organizations. UML leader Madhav Nepal insisted that the five agitating parties were on the same wave length in terms of political tactics and henceforth would meet with the King only as a group to avoid his attempts to split the opposition coalition.

17. (C) Significantly, all the political leaders assiduously avoided any comment on their own political ambitions or their willingness to accept a prime minister from another party. All seemed insecure and suspicious that the King would decide to appoint another party leader, or even a non-partisan figure, to head a new government. Nothing that any of them said suggested they had any premonition that Prime Minister Thapa would resign the next day.

INTERNATIONALS UNITED

18. (C) The only group that appears relatively united in Kathmandu is the international community, which is pressing both the King and the parties to enter a dialogue, compromise, and turn their united attention to the Maoist insurgency. In DAS Camp,s May 6 meeting with Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran, the Indian stated what could have been U.S. talking points: both King and parties must show flexibility; any candidate the parties could agree on was fine, so long as there was a multi-party government. The same sentiments were echoed by most diplomats and major donors at the Nepal Development Forum.

19. (U) DAS Camp has cleared this message.
BOGUE